

Opening Remarks and Presentations⁶

Opening Remarks: Dr. Randy W. Schekman

This was a remarkable century for women in science. For most of the past 100 years, women were not recognized for their contributions; even Marie Curie had no academic appointment at her own institution. As late as the 1970s, there were almost no women in most chemistry departments, with considerable antagonism against women in science. So, we've come a long way in a short period of time. The American Society of Cell Biology (ASCB) has helped this progress, with its strong, although short, history of representation for women. Half of the 9,500 ASCB members are women, the greatest proportion of whom are young women. As a progressive and activist organization, ASCB offers many programs to women through WICB (Women in Cell Biology). WICB holds career lunches, where 500 people meet to discuss furthering women's careers; has a standing column in the Cell Biology newsletter, in which articles such as "The Impostor Syndrome" are published; and sponsors annual awards to shine the spotlight on junior and senior scientists. On behalf of ASCB, thank you for coming to AXXS '99.

Welcome Address: Dr. Ruth L. Kirschstein

Welcome on behalf of the National Institutes of Health, particularly on behalf of Donna Shalala, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. I'd like to talk about what Dr. Schekman said. While I agree that things have changed, I think we need to acknowledge that they have not changed that much. It is true, as of 1999, that 44 percent of medical school classes are women; that women earn more than 50 percent of graduate degrees in the biological sciences; and that young women are entering faculty positions. But, it is also true that when you go to look for outstanding, well-experienced, high-level cell biologists, biochemists, and biophysicists to serve on outstanding committees and advisory councils as full professors, they are hard to find. So, our challenge for next century is to continue the pipeline. You are here now for two things to happen: (1) to have more men at meetings like this, and (2) to have more women from whom to select to represent all of cell biology, all of biochemistry, and all of other specialties represented here.

⁶ All remarks are summarized and paraphrased.

It's good for the country to be represented by a broader array of scientists. Join me in this effort. We need all of you and all of your colleagues to make sure that we are taken seriously, and that we do plan for the future. I challenge you to work with all of us. The new millennium is a wonderful place to start. Thank you.

Keynote Address: Dr. Carola Eisenberg

Frederick Douglass, a former slave, abolitionist leader, and advisor to Abraham Lincoln, said, "Without the struggle, there is no progress." If women are to achieve equality in science, women have to lead the fight. We must help each other and ourselves. How many of you have nominated a female colleague for membership in the scientific organizations to which you belong? Asked a colleague to nominate a woman to membership? Nominated a woman for a prize? Solicited nominations from others on behalf of colleagues? If you have not, you are in default of duty.

Men generally do not think of women for membership, awards, prizes, and promotions. Once the names of women are put forward, men who are already in the club must make a conscious decision to include or exclude them. We have to see that the names surface. And what we cannot accomplish separately, we can accomplish when we join forces. We must join with our colleagues, insist on and analyze the facts, and seek allies among male faculty. It is up to us to fight until equity is achieved.

Gender discrimination is widespread. Most of us in this room are guilty of unintentional gender discrimination, because negative ideas about women in science are part of the academic culture we have grown up in. Yet, the issues go above and beyond academia, involving social and biological roles unique to women. While there are no tidy solutions, there are things universities can do: provide paid parental leave; subsidize quality day care; delay the tenure clock for the parent who stays home to care for the children; develop re-entry programs for women who have taken time off for children; and abolish gender-based salary discrepancies. But, after all of that has been done, the women's movement must take the lead in shifting social values to permit women to choose family and career, without penalizing them. We have to change an American ethos that exalts work over family life, that assigns family responsibilities disproportionately to women, and that fails to prepare men to be fully human. Indeed, if we succeed in moderating work demands in a society that is obsessed with work, the benefit will be no less great for men than it will be for women.

We have come a long way. We have a long way to go. It's a struggle we can win!

Closing Remarks: Dr. Vivian W. Pinn

I hope you feel that this meeting is a time of value, a positive meeting in terms of learning, exchanging information, and moving forward. We can no longer just reiterate problems; it's time to overcome the problems. I'm excited to hear the action plans and the comments on how to refine them and make them better. I love the focus on mentoring, which is an extremely important part of anything we do. Throughout the presentations, I kept thinking about what the Office of Research on Women's Health could do to help. We need to keep this momentum going. Your initiatives may require funding and organization to implement, and some may take a while to do. It will be lovely if, in a year's time, we see the birth of a new consortium. So, I think we should consider some sort of smaller follow-up meeting, within the next few months, to keep these ideas fresh. The group could be an ad hoc task force, with one or two representatives for each working group here. And there are other clinical societies that might like to join us. We've opened the door. Let's see what we can bring forward together.